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Tears, tiffs & tantrums: Britain is a nation of bad losers

- *Two thirds of parents admit both they and their kids are bad sports*
- *Cricket organisations to deliver sportsmanship lessons in schools*
- *"You cannot be serious?" McEnroe still tops the sporting brat pack*

Young people find it difficult to lose graciously in sport, while their parents are just as bad, according to research published today by MCC and the Cricket Foundation.

FIFA President Sepp Blatter labelled us a nation of 'bad losers' after the failed World Cup bid, last December, and it looks like he could be right. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of 1,008 parents of children, aged eight to 16, polled say their kids reacted badly to losing. 'Sulking' (38%), 'getting angry with themselves' (28%) and 'crying' (20%) were the most common antics of the young sore losers.

In a separate survey of children aged eight to 16, three-quarters (76%) of respondents say they see similar reactions from their team mates when they lose a game. Sulking topped the list of reactions again, along with 'getting angry with team mates' (37%), 'storming off' (27%), 'shouting' (26%) and 'swearing' (21%).

To help teach young people how to win and lose graciously when playing competitive sport, Marylebone Cricket Club and the Cricket Foundation are delivering a nationwide scheme to encourage 'fair play' in schools. From the start of the summer term, the MCC Spirit of Cricket initiative will bring lessons in good sportsmanship to children in the 4,000 state schools involved in the 'Chance to Shine' cricket education programme.

In the survey, one child describes how 'after I beat somebody, they kicked the wall of the squash court and broke two of their toes', while another recalls a team mate who 'if he loses, he starts swearing loudly, then runs away and locks himself in the toilets'.

Parents behaving badly

The sportsmanship lessons come too late, however, for the 60% of parents who admit to being bad losers themselves as children; with 40% sulking and 20% crying after they lost a match. More worryingly, parents today are behaving badly when watching children's sports, according to two thirds of respondents. They describe other parents 'mocking opposition' (39%), 'using foul and abusive language to referee or umpire' (38%), 'being aggressive' (32%), 'using foul and abusive language to the opposition' (27%) and also 'towards their own child' (17%).

John Stephenson, Head of Cricket at MCC says: "Wanting to win and trying your hardest is important for anyone playing sport, young or old. MCC's partnership with the Cricket Foundation highlights the significance of healthy competition whilst discouraging a win-at-all-costs mentality, and aims to ensure thousands of young people adopt the Spirit of Cricket principles of playing hard and fair."

Wasim Khan, Chief Executive of the Cricket Foundation adds: "Through the MCC Spirit of Cricket initiative in Chance to Shine schools we're teaching young people one of the most valuable lessons in life: how to claim victory and accept defeat magnanimously. We want a child to 'keep a straight bat', not act like a sporting brat."

Other highlights of the MCC/Cricket Foundation survey include:

- Girls are better sports than boys. 83% of males witness bad sports among their team mates, compared to 71% among females;
- Two thirds of parents (64%) admit they should teach their kids how to be a good sport, while most children (40%) say their PE teacher is responsible;
- Wales has the worst losers. 87% of children say their team mates showed brattish behaviour when they lost a match (compared to 76% national average);
- London has the best losers. Less than a third of children (31%) say their team mates were sore losers;
- Half of respondents (51%) agree with Sepp Blatter and think we are a nation of bad losers; 49% disagreed.
- It's not all bad news: 96% of parents say their children were 'gracious in victory', while nearly three-quarters of children (72%) shake hands with the opposition or with the umpire/referee (31%) after losing a game.

Sporting Brat Pack

Last month could be described as 'March Meltdown' after a spate of childish behaviour at the elite end of sport including: Australia's Ricky Ponting hurling cricket equipment at the dressing-room TV, AC Milan's Gennaro Gattuso's attempted head butt, West Brom's Jonas Olsson's Stoke picture smash and Sir Alex Ferguson's referee rant. But how much impact does bad sporting behaviour by professional sportsmen and women have on their young fans?

Despite four out of ten parents worrying that their child would mimic a sportsperson acting like a sore loser, more than two thirds (68%) of children polled say they are not influenced by sporting stars. Only four per cent of children said they would copy a badly behaved sportsperson.

Fortunately, just two per cent of young people think sport stars are responsible for teaching them good sporting behaviour as Wayne Rooney (2nd), Cristiano Ronaldo (3rd), Sir Alex Ferguson (4th) and Tiger Woods (5th) all feature in the list of 'worst sporting brats'. John McEnroe came top, with one fifth of the votes, and is still regarded by the public as the worst loser in sporting history after his notorious on-court outbursts.

Meanwhile, Gary Lineker comes top of the 'Good Sports' table. Other paragons of sporting virtue include David Beckham (2nd), Sir Steve Redgrave (3rd), Dame Kelly Holmes (4th) and Sir Chris Hoy (5th).

Another positive sporting role model, England skipper Andrew Strauss, backed today's launch by MCC and the Cricket Foundation, saying: "The Spirit of Cricket is about playing the game hard and trying to win, but doing it fairly. I think that's a good lesson for life. Of course you can cut corners and cheat, or bad mouth your opposition, but ultimately you don't get as much satisfaction as doing it the right way."

Former England cricketer turned sports psychologist Jeremy Snape, director at performance coaching company *Sporting Edge*, provides his 'Top 10 tips on how to keep your cool when you lose' at lords.org/soc where users can also find more about the MCC Spirit of Cricket scheme.

The full survey can be viewed in the media section of chancetoshine.org

- Ends -

For more information please contact:

The Cricket Foundation

Fabian Devlin, Head of Communications T. 07920 502 152
E. fabian.devlin.cricketfoundation@ecb.co.uk

MCC

Neil Priscott, Media Manager T. 020 7616 8523/07876 746038
E. Neil.Priscott@mcc.org.uk

Notes to editor

- Opinion Matters questioned a representative sample of 1,007 children aged 8-16 and 1,008 parents of children aged 8-16 between 14th-28th February 2011.
- **About Cricket Foundation/MCC Spirit of Cricket partnership**

In 2011, around 400,000 children in just under 4,000 'Chance to Shine supported by Brit Insurance' schools will be introduced to the key MCC Spirit of Cricket messages enshrined in the Laws of the game, as a result of the

MCC/Cricket Foundation partnership. There are three core elements to the partnership: communicating the MCC Spirit of Cricket message to children within schools through special assemblies, organising intra school competitions and MCC Spirit of Cricket Summer Camps.

Chance to Shine coaches will deliver the MCC Spirit of Cricket message as part of the core Chance to Shine programme. MCC and the Cricket Foundation have produced a special MCC Spirit of Cricket online DVD resource for school assemblies that cover key aspects of the MCC Spirit of Cricket.

Each Chance to Shine school will also be provided with an MCC Spirit of Cricket Trophy to support intra school competition. This allows children to put into practice what they have learnt in the classroom. Pupils' fair play will be recognised and rewarded at the school sessions.

Working through the County Cricket Boards, the Cricket Foundation and MCC will deliver 12 MCC Spirit of Cricket summer camps for children across five regions, the North, London, South West, Midlands and Wales. The camps will be girls only and each of the camps will involve members of the World Cup-winning England women's cricket team.

About MCC Spirit of Cricket

MCC is the owner of Lord's, the Home of Cricket, and is the Guardian of the Laws and Spirit of Cricket. The Club actively promotes its "Play Hard, Play Fair" message around the world, from the grassroots to the elite level. In addition to its partnership with the Cricket Foundation, MCC collaborates with cricketing organisations across the globe to ensure the game is played in a sportsmanlike manner. Later this week, each Indian Premier League captain will sign a charter to adhere to the MCC Spirit of Cricket principles at the high-profile Twenty20 tournament.

About 'Chance to Shine supported by Brit Insurance'

Chance to Shine is one of the single biggest grass-roots sport for development programmes ever undertaken in Britain. The Cricket Foundation charity runs Chance to Shine and aims to establish regular coaching and competitive cricket opportunities in a third of state schools by 2015. As a result, two million primary and secondary children will reap the educational benefits of playing competitive cricket. In 2010, the charity celebrated a major milestone: the one millionth child to be coached through Chance to Shine.